

# CONSULTATION REPORT

## **Democratic Governance, Women's Rights and Gender Equality: Building Partnerships for a New Global Research Initiative**

A two-day international consultation hosted by  
Women's Rights and Citizenship (WRC) Program  
International Development Research Centre (IDRC)  
*150 Kent Street, Ottawa, Canada*  
*December 1-2, 2009*

### **IDRC's Women's Rights and Citizenship Program**

The International Development Research Centre's (IDRC) Women's Rights and Citizenship (WRC) program supports applied research in the field of women's rights, citizenship and development. Located within IDRC's Social and Economy Policy (SEP) program area, WRC contributes to bringing Southern voices into current debates in the international gender and development field.



WRC's mission is to support research on the rights and citizenship of poor and marginalized women in the developing South. The program supports the use of research methodologies that are empowering to participants, and that seek to engage meaningfully with decision-makers and policy debates, with a view to informing equitable and sustainable social change.

Claire McEvoy/IRIN

### **Background to the Consultation**

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IDRC hosted the international consultation, *Democratic Governance, Women's Rights and Gender Equality: Building Partnerships for a New Global Research Initiative* on December 1-2, 2009. Participants included academics from international and Canadian universities, researchers, civil society activists, and representatives of multilateral, bilateral and donor agencies working in the field of democratic governance, women's rights and gender equality. The consultation agenda and participant list may be found in Appendices I and II.

IDRC commissioned eight thematic and regional background papers for the consultation, supported by the Department for International Development (DfID). The thematic papers examine key topics on democratic governance and women's rights that resonate globally: the impacts of women's political representation in parliament; the rule of law and women's access to justice; and the opportunities and challenges of advancing women's rights and gender equality in democratization processes in transitional and post-conflict situations. The regional papers provide intra-regional and cross-regional data and analysis on women's participation in democratic systems and processes, and its impact on their political, economic and social rights.



The background papers are as follows:

- |                                    |  |
|------------------------------------|--|
| • Marilyn Waring                   | Overview of women's political participation globally   |
| • Reem Bahdi                       | Women's access to justice: Texts and contexts  |
| • Dyan Mazurana                    | Understanding the gendered legacies of armed conflict: Women's lives and rights during armed conflict, transition periods and governance |
| • Amaney Jamal                     | Democratic governance and women's rights in the Middle East and North Africa   |
| • Rose Mensah-Kutin                | Democratic governance and women's rights in West Africa  |
| • Sheila Meintjes                  | Gender, governance and democracy in East and Southern Africa   |
| • Seema Kazi                       | Democratic governance and women's rights in South Asia   |
| • Olinda Bareiro and Isabel Torres | Gobernabilidad democrática, derechos de las mujeres y género en América Latina y el Caribe   |

These background papers provided the framework for discussions of research priorities at the consultation, and will inform the development of IDRC's new global research initiative on *Democratic Governance, Women's Rights and Gender Equality*.

## Consultation Overview

Day One of the consultation focused on discussing key concepts in the field of democratic governance. Informed by presentations by Anita Vandenberg of iKNOW Politics, Andrea Martinez of the University of Ottawa, and background paper author

Seema Kazi, discussions drew on participants' expert knowledge, institutional perspectives, and national, regional, and global experiences. Following this dialogue, the themes of women's political participation, the rule of law, women's political participation in conflict and transitional societies, and the role of political parties in advancing women's leadership, were explored through a plenary conversation with Marilyn Waring, Reem Bahdi and Dyan Mazurana, authors of the three thematic background papers, and Mireya Reith of the National Democratic Institute. The regional specificities of democratic governance and women's rights were then explored through presentations on West Africa, East and Southern Africa, South Asia, Middle East and North Africa, and Latin America and the Caribbean, led by the authors of the five regional background papers, Rose Mensah-Kutin, Sheila Meintjes, Seema Kazi, Amaney Jamal, and Olinda Bareiro.

Day Two of the consultation reviewed the current state of knowledge on democratic governance and women's rights, and introduced IDRC's new research initiative. Presentations by the World Bank and the Social Science Research Council highlighted their work in this area. Participants discussed further the thematic and regional research priorities, objectives and outcomes for the initiative, and research methodologies. Groups then brainstormed the sharing and applying of new knowledge through: linking research to policy, engaging political constituencies and processes, and making knowledge accessible to policy, academic and civil society constituencies. The consultation concluded with a session on engaging institutional and strategic partners.

The sessions were conducted through innovative approaches and methods, which encouraged group thinking and engagement. These methods included a 'chat show' forum, which encouraged dialogue between the panelists. One activity enabled participants to map their organization's work in the 'forest' of women's rights and democratic governance, resulting in a visual representation of current work, synergies, and linkages within the field.



## Clarifying Concepts and Definitions

The term 'governance' has been in currency for a long time, and has a number of meanings and applications in different contexts. The concept has gained the status of international development orthodoxy, and in particular, informed the approach adopted in assisting Eastern European countries to move from state-managed economic systems to market-based systems. The terms 'governance' and 'good governance' are often used interchangeably. However, it is important to make the distinction between *governance* as referring to processes of decision-making, mechanisms and management, and *good* or *effective governance* as referring to the quality of these processes, judged against a set of standard principles. Simultaneously, the promotion of democracy and rights-based approaches to development has evolved into a more coherent body of work in development theory and practice referred to as *democratic governance*.

During the consultation, participants reflected that good or effective governance often includes, but is not necessarily limited to, fair and competitive elections, freedom of speech and information, and the right of citizens to influence governments and criticize governing bodies without fear of punishment. Too often, governance is narrowly interpreted as a function of formal state structures, but when discussing women's rights, conceptions of governance must include all sites of gender inequality, including the family and informal centres of power. Women's citizenship also needs to be defined more broadly to extend beyond formal political participation, to more accurately reflect the realities of women's lives and the various ways in which they assert their citizenship.

A reflection from the consultation was that liberal views of democratic governance tend to be distant from the lives of the most marginalized women in the developing South. And further, democratic concepts such as the rule of law, transparency and accountability are distant realities if they do not take into account the crossroads at which women are located, between the state, market, civil society and household, which is exacerbated in fragile states and conflict/ post-conflict situations.

Participants agreed that new research in the field of democratic governance should incorporate critical analysis, both empirical and conceptual, of core concepts and assumptions. Definitions of good governance and democratic governance should be interrogated through the global research initiative. Participants expressed the hope that IDRC's initiative would contribute to field-building by generating new theory and epistemology in the field of democratic governance, women's rights and gender equality, bringing women's experiences to the forefront of the discussion, and informing policy-making and agenda-setting at national, regional and global levels.



## Thematic Research Priorities

The consultation focused on four key themes: women's representation in parliament; the role of political parties in advancing women's leadership; the rule of law and human rights; and the opportunities and challenges of integrating women's rights and gender equality in democratization processes in transitional and post-conflict situations. The following key reflections on thematic entry points emerged from this session:

### Women in Parliament

*Highlights of findings from the background papers:*

Women's political representation globally reached the highest renewal rate on record in 2008, when women took 20.6% of the 12,879 seats up for renewal in 54 countries. Despite the encouraging figures, it is still very difficult for women to achieve elected office and to effect change within parliamentary institutions. Women politicians are constrained by a number of social and political factors that may supersede their commitment to advancing a gender equality agenda. In addition, women's multiple identities mediate the setting of priorities and can create tension between loyalty to her party and to advocating for women's rights policies.



Creating space for women's meaningful participation is critical to influencing policy agendas. In Mozambique, Tanzania and Liberia, prominent women leaders have effectively facilitated women's political participation, while various Asian women leaders have not created space for women to influence decision making or policy. To be successful political actors, women need to adopt appropriate discourses for their specific contexts, as policy-making circles are highly mediated by cultural norms. A recurring theme that emerged from the consultation was the lack of understanding globally of the impact of women parliamentarians, and of how to evaluate women's influence on policy outcomes.

*Areas for further research:*

- Looking beyond figures: case studies of countries such as Iraq and Rwanda, where women's increased representation has not translated into greater policy influence due to national political contexts of increasing authoritarianism and reduced freedoms;
- Where are women a central part of the democratization agenda? Where are they treated peripherally or omitted entirely, and what are the implications for women's participation?
- Comparative data on the use of Temporary Special Measures (TSMs) to achieve positive outcomes for women's representation at different levels of government;
- Women's representation in parliament, on Boards, Commissions and other high-level decision-making fora: to what extent does an increase of women in political and executive positions influence gender equality outcomes?

## **Political Parties**

*Highlights of findings from the presentation:*

Research conducted by UNDP/ NDI reveals that political parties are not responsive to social justice arguments; rather, parties promote women because there is a tangible benefit related to an increase in political power, such as winning elections or garnering greater electoral support. Parties need to understand that there has been a political cost for not promoting women within their ranks. Women can give a party new life and energy. Male party members play a significant role in devolving power and in making the connection between women candidates and winning elections. Donors are also more favourable toward political parties that are supportive to women.

Increasing the number of women in politics is a strategic means to removing the structural causes of inequality between men and women, as it is in political office that women are able to represent their needs and interests on decisions that affect their lives. Quotas have been the most effective short-term strategy for getting women into office. However, even with quotas there has been slow progression in increasing the numbers of women involved in formal politics, and additional strategies are needed to address structural issues. There must be continued incentives for parties to implement quotas, and enforcement mechanisms must reflect the political culture of a particular country. While achieving a critical mass of women (30%) is critical, participants noted that it is not necessarily a prerequisite for advancing a women's rights agenda, as women leaders in key positions of influence can also make significant policy advances even in the absence of a critical mass of women supporters.

## KEY BARRIERS TO WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN POLITICAL PARTIES

<b>Lack of financial resources</b>	<p>Women often have access to fewer resources due to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inadequate political party financing legislation;</li> <li>• Lack of fundraising skills;</li> <li>• Fewer links to corporate and other sources of funds.</li> </ul>
<b>Lack of time</b>	<p>Women continue to bear most of the burden for family and domestic responsibilities while balancing the demands of a political career, including long hours, late-night meetings and frequent travel.</p>
<b>Political party structures</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many political parties do not have internal access points for women and other excluded groups.</li> <li>• Women are frequently given token responsibilities within party hierarchies.</li> <li>• Party nominations and the selection of party lists are often male-dominated.</li> </ul>
<b>Exclusion from existing political networks</b>	<p>Men who seek to enter politics often have a number of informal networks to draw upon, which tend to exclude women. Women do not have similar networks to assist each other.</p>

### *Areas for further research:*

- The ways in which women present their agendas to political party leaders determine how they are received by other party members. What are the entry points for women to negotiate their agendas within the party? What roles can women play in party governance?
- The link between women in politics and policy-making, and creating a dialogue on actual policy issues.

## Rule of Law and Access to Justice

### *Highlights of findings from the background paper:*

Author Reem Bahdi framed the discussion by stating that democratic governance is not only defined by 'one person, one vote,' but also implies a system where individuals living within a particular jurisdiction are treated fairly, respectfully, and equally. She also noted that the rule of law is not necessarily a progressive concept and there is deep scepticism among some legal scholars about using law as a tool for social change. In their view, the more important factor for achieving substantive equality is often not the legal texts themselves, but the decision-makers who hold power. Nonetheless, law is the language of power, and women need to understand its constraints as well as recognize that legal strategies are best invoked with a clear understanding of the context. There is a need to be normative in using a gender lens to examine the rule of law, and also to investigate and make visible both the processes and outcomes of gendered power dynamics in democratic systems.

### *Areas for future research:*

In moving forward with research on this theme, participants agreed that women's activism is significantly ahead of the academic literature. On the ground, there is an understanding that using the law needs to be combined with non-legal strategies. For example, the International Criminal Tribunal in Rwanda recognized that women witnesses needed social and psychological support in order to effectively participate in the legal process. A multidisciplinary challenge for practitioners is to combine legal and non-legal strategies, and reconcile the traditionally independent fields.

- Women's rights assessment of customary law *vis-à-vis* international norms and other legal standards;
- The relevance of customary law to women's access to justice, and the importance of informal mechanisms in women's lives (e.g., marriage, domestic violence, divorce, access to land, etc.);
- Studies of legal strategies used by women to win 'victories', and of when the law is a source of harm to women;
- Feminist analysis of occasions when justice/ peace/ humanitarian efforts are traded off against each other in the pursuit of legal strategies.

## **Transitional and Post-Conflict Societies**

### *Highlights of findings from the background paper:*

Shifts by Western governments towards societal reconstruction and democratic transformation are not simply a technocratic response, but are part of emerging systems of liberal global governance.

At no time is women's representation more crucial, yet simultaneously more lacking, than in official peace negotiations that set the framework for re-organizing states and democracies. Women may have been very active in informal peace processes, but during formal negotiations, notions of transparency and accountability are discarded, war criminals are included, women are excluded, and multiple forms of corruption occur. The opportunities for engagement during democratic transition are very few and short-lived. Women need to have access to networks and resources, and to act fast. State fragility and post-conflict democratization processes can provide an opportunity to implement quotas and other affirmative action measures, e.g., Afghanistan, East Timor, Iraq, Macedonia and Rwanda, where women's participation exceeds 25%. In many cases, women later expressed regret at not having

#### **Resources needed to participate in formal peace processes:**

- 1) An organized base of political support
- 2) Ready access to men and arms
- 3) Economic resources
- 4) Credibility

Actors need at least 1 of these resources to participate; most women have none.



taken advantage of windows of opportunity during the political transition, such as participating in negotiating the peace accord or in drafting the new constitution.

*Areas for future research:*

- The links between the international women's rights agenda, women's experiences in armed conflict, and the democratization process in transition situations;
- Case studies of democratic governance in post-conflict situations informed by women's rights and gender-aware approaches;
- The linkages between economic governance and informal economies in transitional contexts;
- Rebuilding community relationships, re-establishing moral boundaries, or living in a context in which a neighbour was also the violator.

## **Emerging Regional Research Priorities**

The consultation reflected on key findings from the regional background papers, and also discussed emerging topics for future research. Participants noted the importance of identifying the major obstacles that women face globally, and recognizing the mechanisms that can empower women in the short and long term. Further, participants argued the importance of identifying similarities across regions, while at the same time, recognizing differences between and within sub-regions. Lastly, it was noted that comparative studies on the nature and the quality of the links between female political elites and feminist movements are needed.

The following are highlights of findings and areas for future research, from the regional background papers and group discussions:

### **Eastern and Southern Africa**

*Highlights of findings from the background paper:*

Women's growing presence in governance institutions has generally not had a transformative impact on the pervasive patriarchal cultures and practices in the region. Progress in opening up spaces for women's political participation has not been accompanied by a diminution of male-dominated power structures. A disturbing pattern noted by author Sheila Meintjes is that due to factors such as high HIV/AIDS prevalence in the region, traditions are being reinvented that threaten to completely undermine the social and political gains that women have made in the last 25 years. Women's rights claims are made in the context of states and societies that have been in deep economic and social crisis, where the language of human rights can be an alien

concept. Meintjes also noted that non-democratic African states are particular in their tendency to promote *disorder* to justify their continued hold on power, as seen recently in Kenya and Zimbabwe. Nonetheless, women have, and continue to play significant roles in key areas such as peacebuilding and reconstruction.

*Areas for future research:*

- The intersection of male-dominant state institutional culture, national gender machineries, and women's rights advocacy and civil society mobilization, to provide new thinking on developing a women's empowerment agenda;
- The intersection of culture and governance, for example, public violence against individual women politicians and other women leaders is treated with impunity;
- Increasing male control over women, their bodies and sexuality, and what strategies need to be adopted to reverse this development;
- The impact of the HIV/AIDS pandemic on conceptions of gender equality, and on the social and political gains that women in the region have made.

## **West Africa**

*Highlights of findings from the background paper:*

Background paper author Rose Mensah-Kutin discussed how the quest for democratic governance is not a new phenomenon in West Africa; as in Eastern and Southern Africa, it is rooted in the historical and colonial experiences of the region. The fragility of the region in terms of its history, religion, Anglophone/ Francophone fragmentation, the endemic nature of *coup d'états*, and the prevalence of militarism have significantly shaped the opportunities for promoting women's rights, although even countries with relatively stable democracies face similar challenges. In examining both stable democracies and states emerging from conflict, the author found that the region has demonstrated a limited interest in integrating women's rights agendas in democratic processes.

*Areas for future research:*

- Comparative analysis of democratization processes in Anglophone and Francophone West African countries, and the impacts on women's rights and gender equality;
- The gender dimensions of women's political participation within a socio-economic and cultural framework characterized by conflict and militarism;
- The impact of history, tradition, and religion on women at different levels in transitional democratic processes;
- Whether increasing women's political participation promotes gender justice;
- How emerging trends of religious fundamentalism influence women's lives in terms of political participation and governance processes;
- The development of young women's leadership.

## Middle East and North Africa (MENA)

### *Highlights of findings from the background paper:*

Author Amaney Jamal discussed how advances in democracy and good governance, which are necessary for raising the status of women across the region, are constrained by state repression, heightened security, and international support for authoritarian regimes. In examining issues of women's rights and governance in MENA, it is important to remember that women are living in undemocratic states, and the potential to assert policy preferences resulting in gender-aware policy outcomes should not be overstated. The rule of law remains weak within MENA and although there are some laws that guarantee women's participation in the public sphere, they need to be further enforced.



Jamal situated women's rights struggles in the MENA region between the priorities of the donor community, and those of authoritarian regimes that need to appease conservative and traditional religious sectors in society. This has resulted in a strategy whereby states offer cosmetic gestures to the donor community while simultaneously reinforcing patriarchal norms and dictates. Opponents of women's rights in the region have succeeded in portraying Western efforts to address gender discrimination as part of a larger geo-political pattern of colonization and repression. Likewise, democratization will not be meaningful or sustainable if it is seen as a Western project.

### *Areas for future research:*

- The linkages between economic empowerment and women's empowerment; women in MENA have an extremely low economic activity ratio and are heavily dependent on male providers;
- Implications of the growing differences in inter-generational understandings of citizenship;
- What are other potential arenas for Arab women's participation and empowerment, beyond state political structures? Where do Arab women see opportunities for empowerment?
- Research that encourage the elaboration of a women's rights and gender equality discourse that resonates with Islamic society. Safe public spaces for women are often religious spaces, and the international community must become better at working with socio-political structures and relations that are based on religion.

## South Asia

### *Highlights of findings from the background paper:*

Since independent South Asian states emerged in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, democracy in the region has deepened despite being founded in a context of extreme social inequalities. Author Seema Kazi discussed how democracy in South Asia combines a heightened awareness of political rights at the individual and community levels with the demand for basic necessities through the provision of public services. A critical finding was that the family is one of the principal sites of gender inequality in South Asia and the importance of state intervention for South Asia's large majority of underprivileged women cannot be overstated. The paradox between democracy and socio-economic inequality provides the overarching framework for understanding women's political marginalization in the region. In her research, Kazi also found that the class dimensions of women's marginalization are largely un-addressed in existing literature on gender and governance in South Asia.

Methods and tools for assessing the influence of female parliamentarians in South Asia must be improved in order to develop a deeper understanding of the meaning of women's political participation. The region presents a paradoxical picture in terms of women's engagement with politics and political parties as it has the largest number of female heads of state in the world, but also a poor representation of women in formal politics. The institutionalization of democracy through formal means is not leading to major changes for women, and while governments may pass laws that are favourable to women, these acts are meaningless if no budget is allocated to finance changes in practice.

### *Areas for future research:*

- The role of South Asian women's movements in democratization processes;
- Experiences of Dalit, Adivasi and other minority women *vis-à-vis* national and local governance institutions;
- Comparative analysis of women's engagement with political parties in South Asia, to assess the impact of such engagement on women's political participation and to document best practices/campaigns in the region.

## Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC)

### *Highlights of findings from the background paper:*

There has been a rethinking of democratic governance in LAC, as issues such as gender equality, the emergence of previously excluded political actors, the globalization of capitalism, and a tendency of power concentration have become inter-related in a new socio-political context. Despite a trend of democratization in the region since the 1980s, events such as the recent political crisis in

Honduras indicate that democracy remains to be meaningfully consolidated. Women in the region continue to face challenges in translating formal rights into rights claiming through governance institutions. During the consultation, author Olinda Bareiro discussed how concepts of democracy and citizenship should be more responsive to women's needs and participation in politics.

*Areas for future research:*

- The limits of democracy in promoting equality and advancing a women's rights agenda;
- The impact of LAC women's movements on the regional socio-political culture;
- Obstacles and challenges faced by women in positions of political power: What are the new exclusionary practices used against women in politics, when political harassment is another mechanism for the exercise of violence?
- Processes of democratization within political parties with regard to equality, and if/ how parties have been transformed through the participation of women;
- Analysis of the impact of legislation, public policies and the institutionalization of gender in reducing the gap between legal equality and substantive equality.

The background papers all identified the need to support research that is relevant to women's lives, and that will promote gender justice. This requires serious effort in bridging the gaps between 'academic' and 'activist' research, an area where it was felt that this new IDRC initiative could fill a critical niche.

## **Sharing and Applying Knowledge on Democratic Governance, Women's Rights and Gender Equality**

Participants shared their experiences and lessons learned on the following themes: research methodologies; transforming ideologies, discourses, and paradigms through research; linking research to policy; engaging political constituencies; and making knowledge accessible to policy, academic, and grassroots constituencies.

The key highlights of the group discussions include:

### **Research Methodologies**

- There is a pressing need for feminist perspectives and research to inform key initiatives and processes in the transition period following armed conflict.
- There is often a divide between what is defined as 'scientific research' and the lives of women and the poor, and researchers should seek to reconcile this quantitative/qualitative dichotomy.



- Research granting institutions often discourage methodological risk and innovation. It is critical that granting agencies and researchers are open to alternative ways of conducting research, particularly when working with marginalized women.
- Examples of methodologies that are particularly appropriate for research involving poor and marginalized women include: storytelling and autobiography, time use surveys, exploratory sampling, systems analysis, application of ethno-methodologies to gender research, discourse analysis, phenomenology, and action learning.
- Participatory action research is a useful strategy for empowering feminist researchers and mentoring young activists and leaders.
- This research initiative has the potential to foster the development of new theories and epistemologies that are grounded in the knowledge and experiences of women in the developing South. IDRC should encourage researchers to pursue the production of new theories and epistemologies.

### **Transforming Ideologies, Discourses, and Paradigms through Research**

- It is important to recognize the importance of using participatory research methodologies, triangulation, and mixed methods. Yet, it is often a struggle for participatory research to be recognized within academic institutions. Institutions tend to emphasize the idea of the objective researcher, which can lead researchers to distance themselves from more participatory methodologies.
- The concept of decolonizing research is a key one.
- Research needs to keep pace with the process of change within communities.
- Research agendas should not be defined by policy agendas; researchers should have the scope to think outside the box of the current policy framework. An important question is: "Should researchers set the research agenda themselves?"
- If different actors are collaborating on a project, e.g., researchers, activists and policy makers, this can facilitate policy influence because partners are already engaged in a dialogue.
- Different stakeholders involved in a research project need to learn to put their cards on table and negotiate their different perspectives.
- It is important for researchers to consider the institutional context when seeking to influence policy.

### **Linking Research to Policy**

- Policy influence is a political process; it requires a different set of skills from the capacity to conduct methodologically sound, policy-relevant research. Researchers should therefore not be assumed to be 'policy buffs', and would benefit from capacity building in this area.

- There is a distinction between policy *experts* and policy *makers*; it is useful to work with policy experts to communicate in strategic and savvy ways that can influence policy makers.
- Researchers need not wait until the research process is completed to disseminate findings, which can start during data collection and take advantage of emerging policy opportunities. Policy influence is multilayered; researchers could use the matrix approach, and map policy engagement opportunities at different levels throughout the life of the project.
- There is need to engage civil society, academia, and women and girls in identifying policy opportunities.
- Strategies for policy influence vary depending on the type of research.

### **Engaging Political Constituencies**

- From the early stages of the research process, it is important to identify and target relevant political actors and constituencies.
- Strategic partners can help to package information to facilitate advocacy, lobbying, and engaging with policy makers and policy processes. It is important to speak in a language that is accessible to politicians.
- Research collaboration with civil society contributes different visions and perspectives, engages a broader range of constituencies, and facilitates advocacy.
- There is a need to engage various constituencies including women, so they can put pressure on their Members of Parliament (MPs).
- Building alliances with men located in strategic places can help translate research findings and recommendations into policy outcomes.
- Actively monitor policy spaces.

### **Making Knowledge Accessible**

- Make effective communication a key issue from the outset of the research project.
- Use innovative approaches for capturing and sharing research findings, such as photography, film, song, dance, or theatre.
- Consider new forms of social networking such as: blogs, twitter, cell phone texting, etc.
- Return to the communities for the validation of research findings.
- Continually pose the question: “Who is driving the narrative?” It is important for communications to reflect knowledge and learning from the ‘ground.’
- Use local languages, and be aware of and engage illiterate individuals.

## **Introducing IDRC's New Global Research Initiative on *Democratic Governance, Women's Rights and Gender Equality***

IDRC is currently developing the new global research initiative on *Democratic Governance, Women's Rights and Gender Equality*. The initiative stems from the recognition that there is a need to produce more empirical evidence on the relationship between women's political engagement in systems of democratic governance, and the advancement of women's rights and gender equality. As highlighted in the background papers, it is clear that any analysis of democratization that fails to incorporate a gender perspective will be flawed. The initiative will support new research on whether and how democratic governance systems and processes respond to women's rights, needs and priorities.

The vision of the initiative is to produce methodologically sound research findings, which can be utilized by policy makers to formulate and implement policies that can lead to a strengthening of women's political citizenship in the developing South.

The initiative is being launched in 2010 in partnership with key institutions in the field. IDRC intends to immediately commit CAD \$2 million toward this initiative. The initiative will select and fund research projects in Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and North Africa, South Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean. The number of projects selected will correspond to levels of funding available.

### **Objectives of the Initiative**

The initiative will pursue the following overall objective:

- To support researchers in the developing South to generate high-quality, context-specific and comparative research on whether and how women's political engagement in democratic governance systems makes a difference to advancing the women's rights and gender equality policy agenda.

The initiative will pursue the following specific objectives:

- To strengthen the capacity of researchers in the developing South to conduct methodologically sound, social science research on democratic governance, women's rights and gender equality;
- To synthesize research findings and communicate new knowledge in order to advance women's political, economic and social rights and citizenship;
- To advance global knowledge and contribute to new theory, epistemology, policy and praxis in the field of democratic governance, women's rights and gender equality.

## Partnering Strategy

The partnering strategy of the initiative is to: *“Develop financial and strategic partnerships with international organizations, donors, governments, civil society and academia, to increase the scope and impact of the research findings.”*

**IDRC recognizes the importance of effective partnerships, which are based on the following principles:**

- To promote greater collaboration among research funders and enhance effectiveness in development research;
- To build the research capacity and increase the flow of resources to development research institutions in the South; and
- To facilitate knowledge sharing and exchange for development.

## Initiative Phases

At this time, the following phases of the initiative are proposed. These stages are flexible and will be developed through consultations with key strategic partners.

- **December 2009 Consultation:** “Building Partnerships for a New Global Research Initiative”.
- **Launch of the initiative at the 54<sup>th</sup> Commission on the Status of Women**, at a side event to be held on March 10<sup>th</sup>, 2010 at UN headquarters, in collaboration with the Government of Antigua and Barbuda, and UNDP.
- **Selection of research projects** from West Africa, Eastern and Southern Africa, the Middle East and North Africa, South Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean.
- **Regional and global workshops for research capacity building.**
- **Data collection, monitoring, and synthesis of research results.**
- **Dissemination of research findings to inform/ influence policy and social change.**
- **Monitoring and Evaluation** (during the research process and at the conclusion of the initiative).

## *Appendix I: Agenda*

### **“Democratic Governance, Women’s Rights and Gender Equality: Building Partnerships for a New Global Research Initiative”**

International Development Research Centre (IDRC)

150 Kent Street, 8<sup>th</sup> Floor, Ottawa, Canada

December 1-2, 2009

#### **Objective of the Consultation**

To engage experts and potential partners in the development of a new global research initiative by:

- Exchanging ideas, views and experiences
- Reflecting on the findings of eight commissioned background papers
- Brainstorming the thematic and regional research agenda of the initiative, and its approach to sharing and applying new knowledge generated
- Identifying synergies and linkages with related work in the field, and strategic partnerships with key constituencies that could contribute to the success of the initiative

#### *Day 1: Tuesday, December 1, 2009*

##### **1. Welcome**

Rohinton Medhora, Vice-President, Programs, IDRC

##### **2. Overview of the initiative and introduction to the consultation**

Rawwida Baksh, Program Leader, WRC

##### **3. Democratic governance, women’s rights and gender equality: Concepts and definitions**

This session seeks to clarify concepts and definitions based on participants’ expert knowledge and experiences. Lead presentations by Anita Vandenberg, iKNOW Politics, and Andrea Martinez, University of Ottawa, will be followed by a response from Seema Kazi, author of the South Asian background paper, leading into small group discussions.

##### **4. Synergies and linkages: Mapping interests**

Presentation by Sudarsana Kundu of UNIFEM. In small groups, participants then elaborate on potential synergies and linkages between the initiative and their work in the field.

##### **Lunch – screening of two short films:**

1. IDRC film, *Decentralization and Women’s Rights*
2. iKNOW Politics film trailer, *Getting Ahead: Testimonials of Women in Politics*

##### **5 a. A conversation with authors of thematic papers**

Eileen Alma, Program Officer, IDRC, facilitates a conversation with background paper authors Marilyn Waring, Reem Bahdi, and Dyan Mazurana, and Mireya Reith of NDI.

##### **5 b. Thematic group discussions**

Participants join one of the 4 thematic groups to further discuss the findings emerging from the background papers. Participants critically assess this theme within the global research initiative and identify key research questions.



## **6. Findings from the regional papers: Speed rounds**

IDRC commissioned 5 background papers on: West Africa; Eastern and Southern Africa; Middle East and North Africa; South Asia; and Latin America and the Caribbean. Authors Rose Mensah-Kutin, Sheila Meintjes, Seema Kazi, Amaney Jamal, and Olinda Bareiro present to groups in rounds lasting 7 minutes. Participants listen to each presentation and then choose a region to discuss more in-depth in small groups.

*Day 2: Wednesday, December 2, 2009*

### **7a. Developing a research agenda on democratic governance, women's rights and gender equality**

Francisco Cos-Montiel, Senior Program Specialist, IDRC presents the conceptual framework and preliminary research agenda, based on pre-consultation discussions and activities on Day 1.

### **7b. Presentation by A. Waafas Ofosu-Amaah, World Bank**

## **8. Generating new knowledge on democratic governance, women's rights and gender equality**

The following areas are discussed in 4 groups:

- thematic research priorities
- regional research priorities
- research methodologies
- objectives and outcomes

## **9. Sharing and applying new knowledge on democratic governance, women's rights and gender equality**

In parallel topic groups the following aspects of the initiative are discussed:

- linking research to policy
- engaging political constituencies and processes
- making knowledge accessible to policy, academic and civil society constituencies

## **10. Engaging institutional partners for the new global research initiative**

Presentation by Victoria Hopkins, Partnership Officer, Partnership and Business Development Division, IDRC, outlining IDRC's approach to institutional partnerships.

Presentation by Jennifer Klot, Senior Adviser, HIV/AIDS and Gender and Security at the Social Science Research Council (SSRC).

Participants then break into groups to discuss strategic partnerships with key constituencies and collaborations that will expand the scope and impact of this initiative:

- engaging governments, international agencies, and other relevant policy institutions
- engaging civil society and social movements
- engaging academic institutions
- engaging research funders

## **11. Next steps and close of consultation**

## *Appendix II: List of Participants*

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